

LEWIS & CLARK CAVERNS STATE PARK MANAGEMENT PLAN

DECISION RECOMMENDATION

May 2, 2000

Summary of Preferred Management Plan Alternatives

A draft Management Plan was prepared for Lewis & Clark Caverns, Montana's first state park, and distributed for public review in February, 2000. This Plan serves to establish the overall direction for the provision of visitor services; the management and protection of natural, cultural, historic, and recreational resources; and the development of all associated facilities and programs over the next ten years. The Plan is a working, dynamic document that guides the day-to-day operation of the Park, as well as serving as the basis for management decisions and actions.

The following summarizes the preferred options for each issue. These options collectively form the preferred management plan alternative for Lewis & Clark Caverns State Park.

<u>Issue</u>	<u>Description</u>
1) <i>New Trails</i>	Full development of all trail routes (utilizing some old jeep roads).
2) <i>Trail Use</i>	Hiking only.
3) <i>Lewis & Clark Bicentennial</i>	Proceed with planning and preparation.
4) <i>Land Acquisitions</i>	Support Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) Lands Section efforts to move forward with feasible acquisitions.
5) <i>Campground Imp.</i>	Playground, amphitheater lighting, new trails, expanded irrigation, phase II of the group use area.
6) <i>Hunting</i>	Developed and semi-primitive management zones closed to all hunting; primitive zone open (rifle/shotgun/bow) during general season.
7) <i>Cave Management</i>	Cave Tours: Maximum group size of 30; no age limits. Off-Trail: Very limited off-trail use for management and scientific purposes.

Continue on-going planning efforts on issues such as resource inventories, limits of acceptable change management, and collecting and monitoring environmental data.

- 8) *River Access* Close existing informal access, develop new access with parking, boat ramp, vault restroom, and interpretive displays.
- 9) *Public Contact* New public center/entrance station/offices near Park entrance. Also, improve Park maintenance facilities to enhance employee health, safety, and efficiency. The intent is to protect the Park resources and visitors, while not intruding unnecessarily on the visitor or viewshed. The existing A-frame would be removed.
- 10) *Bighorn Sheep* Park/Citizens Advisory Committee support future reintroduction; to be coordinated by FWP Wildlife Division.

Public Involvement

Throughout the four years of the Lewis & Clark Caverns State Park management planning process, FWP has provided numerous opportunities for public involvement. Public involvement in the management planning process included open house sessions, an on-site visitor survey conducted in 1994, comment on an earlier draft of the plan, and input from the Lewis & Clark Caverns Management Plan Citizens Advisory Committee.

A seven-person committee composed of interested citizens (mainly from the surrounding communities of Three Forks and Whitehall) played an instrumental role in reviewing existing and proposed issues, and various alternatives to address them. The Advisory Committee served to further the opportunity for public input into the Plan through a series of meetings with FWP staff involved with the planning process. Committee members included:

Sherry Cargill, Whitehall-Jefferson County Commissioner
Anne Ore, Three Forks-Magpie Books Owner/Three Forks Chamber of Commerce
Wally Madsen, Whitehall-Former President, Whitehall Business Association
Mike Penfold, Billings-Montana State Parks Association
Ron Roginske, Whitehall-Outdoor Recreation Planner, U.S. Forest Service
Gene Townsend, Three Forks-Three Forks Mayor
Pat Wherley, Three Forks-Three Forks Chamber of Commerce/Development Council

Summary of Comments Received During Recent Public Comment Period

The Lewis & Clark Caverns Park Management Plan Executive Summary Public Review Draft was distributed to over 150 individuals and organizations on February 29, 2000 for a thirty day comment period. Two public open houses were conducted during the comment period. The first was held at the Three Forks Ruby Theatre, on March 14, 2000

from 5 to 7 p.m. Four people attended. The second open house was held at the Whitehall Town Hall on March 16, 2000 from 5 to 7 p.m. Six people attended this open house.

The public comment period for the Management Plan draft was scheduled to end on Monday, April 3, 2000. A letter-to-the-editor in the Wednesday, April 5, 2000 edition of the Bozeman Daily Chronicle newspaper stimulated some additional comments that came in after this date. Additionally, the Bozeman Chronicle did a feature story on the Management Plan in their Saturday, April 8, 2000 edition of the newspaper. All comments received before noon on April 10, 2000 were counted and tallied for this summary.

A total of 15 comments representing both individuals and organizations were received by April 10, 2000. As could be expected, the comments spanned all of the issues presented in the Plan as well as other related and unrelated topics. Following is a summary of the comments on each Management Plan issue and a section on comments received that were unrelated to specific, listed Management Plan issues.

Issue 1: New Trails

Total Comments Received on Issue: Four (4).

Public Comment: Four comments specifically mentioned and supported development of a system of new park trails, mainly utilizing old jeep roads already found primarily in the eastern semi-developed and developed zones of the Park.

FWP Response: So noted.

Issue 2: Trail Use

Total Comments Received on Issue: Five (5).

Public Comment: Two comments were in support of the preferred alternative (hiking only).

FWP Response: So noted.

Public Comment: One comment opposed the restriction prohibiting mountain bikes on Park trails.

FWP Response: Allowing off-road mountain biking in the Park is not a recommendation in this Plan; however, there may be future opportunities for this type of trail use on a very limited basis. At the present, identified trail segments (jeep roads) are limited in number and generally of relatively short distances. It is felt that these segments would best accommodate only one type of trail opportunity (hiking) and that by adding either horseback or mountain bike riding that the likelihood of conflict between user groups would be increased. In addition, other states cited user group conflicts and resource

damage problems with adding mountain biking to trails designed for hiking and cautioned Montana to move cautiously on this issue. Any future mountain bike use would be examined in a separate environmental assessment, should this use be investigated in the future. Bicycles will be permitted on Park roads.

Public Comment: One comment advocated that trails span all fitness levels including those for the disabled.

FWP Response: FWP recognizes that ALL Montanans and visitors to our state have a right to recreational opportunities and access to state parks and other department facilities and programs. Although total accessibility is often impossible to achieve in outdoor settings, especially in Montana's often rugged terrain, it is FWP's intention to make a variety of sites accessible as possible to the greatest number of people, given the limitations of natural and physical features. We will continue to make as many of the facilities, programs and trails at Lewis & Clark Caverns State Park as accessible as possible under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Public Comment: Another comment expressed concern about the potential for noxious weed spread related to increased trail use.

FWP Response: Extensive efforts are and will continue to be made to control and prevent the establishment of noxious weeds at the Park. All weed control and prevention efforts are coordinated with the Jefferson County Weed Board.

Issue 3: Lewis & Clark Bicentennial

Total Comments Received on Issue: One (1).

Public Comment: One comment supported planning and preparation for this commemoration.

FWP Response: So noted.

Issue 4: Land Acquisitions

Total Comments Received on Issue: Two (2).

Public Comment: Two comments were in favor of the land acquisition preferred alternative.

FWP Response: So noted.

Issue 5: Campground Improvements

Total Comments Received on Issue: Six (6).

Public Comment: Two comments favored the preferred alternative, which includes installation of playground equipment for children, amphitheater lighting, construction of a picnic pavilion in the group use area, tree plantings and irrigation system to water the tree plantings.

FWP Response: So noted.

Public Comment: One comment opposed campground expansion as it was felt publicly run campgrounds compete unfairly with private campgrounds in the vicinity. Another comment expressed "mixed feelings about your campground expansion, as it takes away from private business in the Whitehall and Three Forks areas".

FWP Response: The Lewis & Clark Caverns Management Plan does not include any campground expansion. A group use area was constructed to accommodate group-related functions, including schools, company picnics, family reunions and organized group outings. The group use area will not be used as an overflow campground. Furthermore, the Lewis & Clark Caverns campground will cater to the more basic level of camping. There will be no electrical, sewage, or water hookups to accommodate recreational vehicle/trailers installed at this state park. The Park campground is intended to meet a different market need than nearby private campgrounds.

FWP believes that the Lewis & Clark Caverns State Park is a positive economic stimulus to the regional economy and rather than competing with local businesses, the Caverns attracts visitors to the local area.

Public Comment: Another comment expressed qualified support for campground improvements with the exception of the irrigation system.

FWP Response: The Lewis & Clark Caverns campground is located in the arid Jefferson River Canyon where there are few shade trees. The proposed irrigation system will be used to water newly planted trees which FWP feels enhances camping and picnicking use of the campground and group use area.

Public Comment: Another comment expressed concern about noxious weed spread relative to increased use spurred by campground improvements.

FWP Response: Extensive efforts are and will continue to be made to control and prevent the establishment of noxious weeds at the Park. All weed control and prevention efforts are coordinated with the Jefferson County Weed Board.

Issue 6: *Hunting*

Total Comments Received on Issue: Eleven (11).

Public Comment: Five comments were in favor of opening a portion of the park to big game and game bird hunting, including one on behalf of the Montana Wildlife Federation.

FWP Response: So noted.

Public Comment: Three comments opposed hunting in the Park. Two other comments offered safety related measures but did not oppose the activity of hunting.

One of these individuals opposed to hunting questioned the rationale behind some of the information in the plan used to support hunting such as the desirability of managing ungulate animals. They also felt that the survey sample used to demonstrate local support for hunting was too small (19 people) to draw this conclusion. This person didn't feel that hunting would result in a significant economic benefit and might, in fact, cost more in terms of enforcement. It was further argued that non-hunting use of the Park is likely to increase in the future.

Two comments received from people opposed to hunting relayed concerns that few areas were available for non-hunters to hike in during fall hunting seasons where they would feel safe. These comments urged that the Park be closed to hunting for these safety reasons.

Two additional comments on the hunting issue weighed in as follows: One comment felt that hunting should be by shotgun, archery and black powder to enhance hiker and hunter safety, while another comment requested that hunting and non-hunting areas be well marked so hikers are safe during the hunting season.

FWP Response: Hunting has been prohibited in Lewis & Clark Caverns State Park since it's inception as a park (1937). The Park is 3,034 acres in size. The Management Plan preferred alternative for the hunting issue would permit hunting in the western half of the park. This portion of the Park (identified as the primitive zone in the Plan) is extremely rugged and is characterized by steep slopes, cliffs, rocky terrain and limited patches of timber. This part of the park has no roads and limited game trails. The Plan identifies only one potential developable trail in this part of the park. This portion of the park is physically separated from the eastern portion of the park by a virtually impenetrable wall of limestone (Cave Mountain) which rises 1,700 feet above the Jefferson Canyon and physically separates the Park into the two units.

All existing and most proposed future trails are in the eastern portion of the Park (identified as the semi-developed and developed zones in the Plan). Again, this portion of the Park is physically separated from the western portion of the Park where hunting would be permitted. At this point in time, fall hiking use in the Park is light, although it will likely increase in the future as more trails are developed.

The Park presently includes populations of mule deer, elk, Hungarian Partridge, turkey and blue grouse that would support hunting. Private landowners in the hunting district

are concerned with the effects of elk and mule deer damage on their ranching operations. Some of these landowners believe that because Lewis & Clark Caverns State Park is closed to hunting, elk move into the Park to escape hunters. Therefore, they feel an adequate harvest of elk is not being obtained. FWP has increased antlerless elk permits in the hunting district to address these concerns and has made it an objective to reduce the number of elk in the area. In addition, FWP has radio collared three elk in the Park area in an attempt to answer the question of whether elk do indeed seek refuge in the Park during hunting season.

As explained in Appendix D, page 109-110 of the Public Review Draft of the full Park Management Plan, hunting at Lewis & Clark Caverns would be permitted only during the general big-game season (Sunday of the last weekend in October through the Sunday of the Thanksgiving Day weekend). Access to areas of the Park open to hunting would be restricted to walk-in only, including game retrieval, from selected access areas located along Montana Highway 2 in the Jefferson River Canyon.

Hunting in Lewis & Clark Caverns State Park is experimental in nature. Hunting would be permitted as long as it does not conflict with the main purpose and mission of the Park. Trapping would not be permitted in the Park.

The preferred alternative recognizes the controversial nature of hunting in this Park. The proposal represents a compromise between factions that would desire the Park remain closed to hunting and those that desire the entire Park be opened to hunting. This further represents balancing local interests in hunting the Park against the lack of interest in hunting by the typical Park visitor, especially out-of-state guests. Park managers felt that by offering hunting we could provide an opportunity for a certain segment of visitors without interfering with the experience of other visitors. It can be a win-win solution because it establishes this new opportunity for some park users without impacting the experience of non-hunters.

Public Comment: The final comment expressed concern that the spread of noxious weeds could be exacerbated by hunting activities.

FWP Response: Extensive efforts are and will continue to be made to control and prevent the establishment of noxious weeds at the Park. All weed control and prevention efforts are coordinated with the Jefferson County Weed Board.

Issue 7: Cave Management

Total Comments Received on Issue: Three (3).

Public Comment: One comment supported the preferred alternative.

FWP Response: So noted.

Public Comment: The other two comments were by seasonal Caverns staff members and were directed at guided tour size and the availability of guides. Specifically, one of these people felt that more staff is necessary at the Park in order to adhere to the preferred guided tour size (30 people). On a similar note, another comment advocated further reducing the preferred guided tour size to 25 people so guides could more adequately manage their groups.

FWP Response: The Lewis & Clark Caverns tour guide staff is passionately interested in providing exceptional and high quality experiences to Park visitors. FWP believes that staffing levels are generally adequate to maintain the preferred tour size of 30 people at most times. However, staffing can be a challenge at times due to illness, vacations, and college starting and ending dates (most of our seasonal staff is college students).

The concept of further reducing guided tour group size to 25 people has merit in terms of guide interaction and control of groups within the confined passages of the cave. However, this further limiting of group size would impact the numbers of visitors we would be able to accommodate on guided tours and would probably force FWP to turn away greater numbers of potential tour visitors. We feel that the proper balance between tour size and visitors desiring cave tours is best achieved at the 30 person tour size limit. We will continue to monitor the tour size limit and will adjust as necessary in the future.

Issue 8: Jefferson River Access

Total Comments Received on Issue: Eight (8).

Public Comment: Four people supported the preferred alternative.

FWP Response: So noted.

Public Comment: The Jefferson County Weed District expressed concerns related to the spread of noxious weeds as a result of river access development.

FWP Response: Extensive efforts are and will continue to be made to control and prevent the establishment of noxious weeds at the Park. All weed control and prevention efforts are coordinated with the Jefferson County Weed Board.

Public Comment: One comment expressed concern that an additional Jefferson River access site might lead to additional river crowding.

FWP Response: FWP utilizes the Fishing Access Site program to facilitate public access to Montana's lakes, rivers and streams. While it is possible that additional access sites may lead to greater levels of river crowding, it is generally felt that the additional access sites can do just the opposite and spread out existing use, thereby easing congestion of Montana waterways. FWP will not dispute that river recreation use levels are increasing and that crowding complaints are increasing.

Public Comment: Two comments were skeptical of FWP's ability to get a permit to cross the Montana Rail Link (MRL) railroad tracks at the suggested access site location. One of these comments additionally suggested an alternate location be considered for the proposed access site due to concerns about safe sight-lines on both the railroad and the highway at the proposed location. The suggested alternative was on private land and it was further suggested that the site be named "Pomp" in recognition of Lewis & Clark Expedition member, Jean Baptiste Charbonneau (Sacagawea's baby son).

FWP Response: The proposed Jefferson River access will require a permit to cross the MRL rail line (or another expensive alternative such as an underpass or overpass). A public railroad crossing permit can be expensive and time consuming to obtain. The difficulty or expense may require adjustments in the access proposal in the future. The recommended alternative access site on private land has been investigated but costs for the property are prohibitive at this time.

Issue 9: Public Contact Center

Total Comments Received on Issue: One (1).

Public Comment: The only comment received on this issue expressed opposition to removing the Park information center (A-frame) because of its Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) historical significance.

FWP Response: The comment mistakenly assumed that the A-frame was constructed by the CCC in the 1930's. This structure was, in fact, built by the state of Montana in 1948. The removal of this structure is advocated because of highway safety concerns, structural problems, the lack of disabled access capability and traffic flow challenges at the Park entrance.

Issue 10: Bighorn Sheep Reintroduction

Total Comments Received on Issue: Six (6).

Public Comment: Five were supportive of the preferred Management Plan alternative. One comment, although supportive of reintroduction to the Park, had the attached caveat, that they not be hunted.

FWP Response: So noted. The proposal to reintroduce bighorn sheep to the Park is not dependent on allowing hunting in the Park.

Other Issues

Fire Management and Emergency Services Plan

Public Comment: The Willow Creek and Whitehall Volunteer Fire Districts, in conjunction with Fire Logistics, Inc., representing Jefferson County as a private

consulting firm to assist the county in developing emergency services plans, have requested that the Park develop a fire management and emergency services plan. Specific recommendations were made by Fire Logistics, Inc. relevant to utilizing existing jeep trails for fire fighting, and developing on-site water supply sources.

Fire Logistics, Inc. suggested minor wording changes to the full draft Park Management Plan section entitled, Management Zoning, Natural Resource Management on pages 48 and 52. Specifically, the language detailing wildfire control for the developed and primitive zones should be reversed.

FWP Response: The suggested wording changes will be made in the final version of the plan.

The Park staff will begin development of these planning components (Fire Management and Emergency Services Plan) immediately, in consultation with Fire Logistics, Inc., the local volunteer fire districts and the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC). It is envisioned that upon completion of these draft plans and acceptance by Jefferson County and the local fire districts, FWP will conduct a thirty day public comment period, incorporate relevant comments into the plan, present to the FWP officials for approval, and begin implementing by the end of 2000.

Noxious Weed Control

Public Comment: The Jefferson County Weed District expressed concerns related to noxious weed control. Specifically, The Weed District did not feel the draft Park Management Plan adequately addresses the noxious weed issue. The Weed District does not feel adequate financial resources are being devoted to noxious weed control efforts at the Park and wants more money allocated for weed control efforts. They have also offered to assist in the development of a more detailed noxious weed control plan for the Park. Further, they expressed concerns that trail use, campground improvements, hunting and development of a river access could adversely impact the spread of weeds.

FWP Response: Weed control efforts on all FWP Region Three properties tier from the Regional Weed Management Plan as stated in the Park Management Plan. The recently redrafted Region Three Weed Management Plan will be sent to the Jefferson County Weed District as soon as it is finalized. The Lewis & Clark Caverns staff will meet with the Jefferson County Weed District to formulate a more detailed, specific weed management plan for the Park and prefer to do this on an annual basis.

Active weed management efforts at Lewis and Clark Caverns are on-going and expanding within the financial capabilities of the Park budget. FWP feels the weed situation at the Park is improving but we recognize that more needs to be accomplished. Particularly troublesome species include knapweed, mullein, houndstongue and Canada thistle. The park takes an active integrated pest management approach to weed control utilizing a combination of chemical, biological and mechanical methods to combat noxious weeds.

Funding

Public Comment: One person asked that funding for the park be maintained and not cut, as this would hamper revenue generation.

FWP Response: The Park "generates" revenue through fees paid for such things as guided tour and camping fees, as well as a percentage of the income of the private business (cafe/nature store) that operates on-site. The Plan does not propose to reduce funding for Lewis & Clark Caverns State Park.

Executive Summary Organization

Public Comment: A comment was received that stated that the introductory material in the Executive Summary of the Park Management Plan was confusing because there was too much duplication.

FWP Response: This is a difficult comment to address as there were no suggestions as to how the Executive Summary could be improved. The Executive Summary was prepared as an easy reference document for the information contained in the full Plan.

Public Input

Public Comment: One responder felt that more people should have been involved in the development of the Management Plan. They felt that more of an effort should have been made to gather comments from all over the state. They further expressed dismay that the citizen advisory committee was "narrow focused", because most of the members were from communities near the Park.

FWP Response: FWP has provided extensive opportunities for public input through the Park management planning process (see page 2). The Park Management Plan Executive Summary was posted on the FWP website (www.fwp.state.mt.us). The document was distributed to over 150 people, many with addresses outside the local area. A news release was prepared and distributed to newspapers statewide, although FWP has no control over whether they print it or not. It can be frustrating to FWP staff when the public does not comment on agency proposals that are widely distributed to interested parties. Whether this indicates unexpressed support or apathy, we are unable to determine.

As to the composition of the citizens advisory committee, FWP thinks it is important to involve primarily local people. These are the people, we have found over the years, who have the most interest and commitment in a state park adjacent to their communities and who are able to attend work sessions with a minimal amount of travel time. We always attempt to balance local participation with willing participants from other localities, but finding people willing to travel and work on difficult issues is challenging.

Revenue Source for the Surrounding Communities

Public Comment: A writer complained that the Plan Management Objective, to *enhance the Park's significance as a destination attraction and revenue source for the state park system and the surrounding community* is "tantamount to giving those communities a seat at the management table", which in turn gives those communities an undue influence over Park policy.

FWP Response: Although this complaint is registered, no evidence is cited to demonstrate that policy established in the Plan has been negatively influenced by the local communities.

The foundation for the Montana State Park System was established by enabling legislation passed by the 1939 Legislature. According to the legislation, the basis for the State Park System was as follows:

For the purpose of conserving the scenic, historic, archaeologic, scientific, and recreational resources of the state and providing for their use and enjoyment, **thereby contributing to the cultural, recreational, and economic life of the people and their health...** (MCA 23-1-101). (Bolding added.)

Since the greatest economic impact of Lewis & Clark Caverns is unlikely to be felt outside the immediate area of the Park, it stands to reason that those closest to the Park will feel this contribution most immediately and should be those we work closely with. This relationship simply recognizes local communities as a partner. All input, whether from near or far, is welcomed and weighted equally.

Rustic Appearance

Public Comment: One writer appealed to FWP to "keep a rustic appearance" to enhance the "Montana experience".

FWP Response: All actions taken at the Park will be done in a sensitive manner recognizing architectural design of existing structures, the history and scenic beauty of the area.

Interpretation

Public Comment: An appeal for more interpretive signing was made in one comment.

FWP Response: FWP recognizes that the interpretive potential of the Park is tremendous and will continue to emphasize this activity. Signing is but one of many techniques utilized in our interpretive efforts.

Appeal Process

The public has two opportunities to appeal specific decisions made in the Lewis & Clark Caverns State Park Management Plan. A decision must be appealed first to the Director of FWP. If the Director upholds the original decision, management plan decisions may be appealed to the FWP Commission, which is the final decision-maker in such cases. The Commission may uphold the original decision, request specific changes, or ask that staff take a fresh look at particular issues. The Commission only plays a decision-making role on a park management plan in cases where the decision has first been the subject of an initial appeal to the Director, and then followed with an appeal to the Commission. Any portions of the plan not specifically appealed are in effect following the Director's approval. Also, projects identified in the plan which have received prior legislative authorization through the capital projects approval process may proceed (beginning with Montana Environmental Policy Act compliance) once the Director has signed-off on the Plan. The appeal must specify the appealed items; it is not sufficient to just appeal the Plan as a whole without being explicit about what is objectionable.

Decision Recommendation

Region Three and the Parks Division recommends that the preferred alternative in the public review draft of the Lewis & Clark Caverns State Park Management Plan be adopted with the additions and modifications endorsed in the **Summary of Comments** section of this decision recommendation. These additions and modifications are summarized below:

Hunting: Will add language to the Plan that acknowledges complaints related to game damage from surrounding landowners which supports the need for managing game populations. Will also state that even though the average park visitor opposes hunting, the preferred alternative represents a balance with local preferences (for hunting) and results in little impact to non-hunting Park users. Additional explanation will be provided that the local survey mentioned in the Plan did not have a large sample size. Will also state that as long as hunting doesn't create conflicts between user groups that it will be allowed.

Cave Management: As mentioned in the Plan, a number of specific cave management issues are being deferred to a later date to allow us the opportunity to collect cave environmental data. Components of this issue, such as inventories of cave biodiversity, limits of acceptable change management, cave environmental conditions, visitor impacts, and a Park-wide geophysical inventory of cave resources will be compiled into a Cave Management Plan which will be prepared in the coming years. We envision amending the Cave Management Plan to the Park Plan when it is completed.

Jefferson River Access: Will add language to the Plan that recognizes that constructing a fishing access along the Jefferson River will be contingent on obtaining a railroad crossing permit.

Fire Management and Emergency Services Plan: Language related to wildfires on pages 48 and 52 of the Full Park Management Plan will be reversed. This will result in the statement under the Natural Resource Management section of the Developed Management Zone that will read; "Wildfires occurring within this zone would be extinguished as soon as possible." The statement under the Natural Resource Management section of the Primitive Management Zone will read; "Wildfires occurring within this zone would be contained and extinguished as soon as possible to protect Park resources and to ensure visitor and employee safety."

We will also insert language into the Plan stating that a Fire Management and Emergency Services Plan will be prepared and amended to the Park plan by October, 2000.

Noxious Weed Control: Will add language to the Plan emphasizing communications with the Jefferson County Weed Board and our intent to tier weed control efforts at Lewis & Clark Caverns State Park from the Region Three Weed Management Plan. We will also recognize the active and on-going nature of weed control efforts at the Park, the integrated (chemical, biological and mechanical) approach to weed control efforts, and list the particular noxious weed species (knapweed, mullein, houndstongue and Canada thistle) that we are currently targeting.

A copy of the public comment summary and decision notice will be added to the final Plan as an appendix.



Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

DECISION NOTICE

It is my decision to adopt the Lewis & Clark Caverns State Park Management Plan preferred alternative with the additions and modifications endorsed in the **Summary of Comments** section of this decision notice. These additions and modifications are summarized below:

Hunting: Language will be added to the Plan that acknowledges concerns related to game damage from surrounding landowners which supports the need for managing game populations. The final Plan will state that even though the average park visitor opposes hunting, the preferred alternative represents a balance with local preferences for hunting and results in little impact to non-hunting Park users. Additional explanation will be provided that the local survey mentioned in the Plan did not have a large sample size. The Plan will state that as long as limited hunting does not create conflicts between user groups, that it will be allowed.

Land Acquisitions: Language in the Plan referring to land acquisitions will be changed to clarify that FWP will only pursue acquisition of in-holdings.

Cave Management: As mentioned in the Plan, a number of specific cave management issues are being deferred to a later date to allow us the opportunity to collect cave environmental data. Components of this issue, such as inventories of cave bio-diversity, limits of acceptable change management, cave environmental conditions, visitor impacts, and a park-wide geophysical inventory of cave resources will be compiled into a Cave Management Plan. We envision amending Park Plan to incorporate the cave management issues when the Management Plan is completed.

Jefferson River Access: Language will be added to the Plan that recognizes constructing a fishing access along the Jefferson River will be contingent on obtaining a railroad crossing permit.

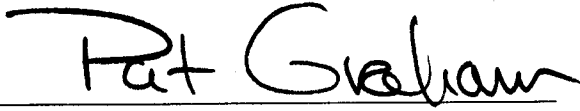
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A copy of the public comment summary and decision notice will be added to the final Plan as an appendix.

All written and oral comments received during the public comment period are attached to this decision notice.



Patrick J. Graham, Director
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

5-17-00

Date